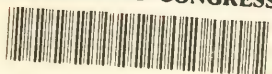


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# COL. MARINUS WILLETT.

THE HERO OF MCHAWK VALLEY.

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AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE

Oneida Historical Society.

BY DANIEL E. WAGER.



UTICA, N. Y.

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## COL. MARINUS WILLETT.

Among the objects and purposes for which the Oneida Historical Society is organized, are the collection and preservation of materials relative to that part of New York formerly known as Tryon county. Within the scope of this organization is the gathering of scant and scattered materials, and weaving them into a narrative relative to the lives of those who have been prominent and foremost in the important and critical period of the existence of the county, and by their valor, patriotism and masterly activity, made the valley of the Mohawk historic ground, and given to it a national importance in the history of the country. Of all the persons who have contributed to this grand result, I think I am safe in saying no one stands out more conspicuously than Col. Marinus Willett. It may be considered a fortunate conclusion that the gathering of materials for a sketch of his life should be no longer postponed, for it is evident that each year's delay lessens the chances and increases the difficulties of obtaining information not already recorded in the well known histories of the times, especially facts which can now be found only in unpublished manuscripts, or in the memory of living witnesses.

In my correspondence and inquiries for facts I luckily ascertained, what is probably known to but a comparatively few, that two sons of Col. Willett are yet alive, the one eighty-six and the other nearly eighty-eight years of age, with bright minds and unclouded intellects, who were able to impart much valuable information concerning their father, which but for their retentive memories and timely aid might have soon passed into hopeless oblivion.

Aside from the "narrative" of Col. Willett, written or dictated mainly, if not entirely by himself after he had attained his seventieth birthday, and published in 1831, the next year after his death, by the elder of the two sons aforementioned, there is no authentic sketch of his life extant. That "narrative" makes no mention of his civil career, which was quite a prominent one in New York, after the close of the revolutionary war, but has reference mainly to some of the more important military events with which he was connected; and even as to those, with the

becoming modesty of a true soldier, but a brief narration is given.

But a few copies of that "narrative" are in existence, and those very difficult to be obtained. The details are too scant and meager to satisfy the longings of those who wish to know more of Col. Willett's life and character—specially those of Tryon county, wherein he achieved his greatest victories, and won his grandest triumphs. So, too, the histories of the stirring times in which Col. Willett lived have not the space to do more than to mention incidentally, or briefly narrate the more prominent events of the stormy period of his life. Hence, it has been no easy matter, though to me a very pleasurable occupation, to glean from the various and widely separated fields of his active labors materials for a paper that will be full and accurate, and do justice to his merits and memory, and worthy of preservation in the archives of this society.

Thomas Willett, the first one of that family name who crossed the Atlantic to make his home in this western world, was born in England, where his father and grandfather had been ministers of the gospel. He came in the good ship *Lion* in 1632, when he was but twenty-two years of age, and settled in the Plymouth colony, not far from the State line of Rhode Island. The records in that colony frequently mention his name, and furnish evidence that he became a person of wealth and prominence. In his young manhood he was a surveyor of highways, captain of a military company, and held other similar positions. He engaged in mercantile pursuits: was interested in sea-going vessels; owned large tracts of land, one of which was formed into a township by the name of "Swansea." In 1650, while a merchant of Plymouth, he was appointed by Peter Stuyvesant, then the Dutch colonial executive of New York, one of the boundary commissioners, to settle the disputed line between the English and Dutch. That line was adjusted, and has passed into history as the "Hartford boundary treaty of 1650." After the English came into power in New York, Capt. Willett was appointed one of the councilors of that colony, and held that office from 1665 to 1673. In 1667 he was appointed by the English governor, Richard Nichols, the first English mayor of New York, from which it would appear he had, in the meantime, become a resident of the metropolis. When the Dutch, in 1673, regained ascendancy in New York, the property of Thomas Willett was confiscated; he died the next year, at the age

sixty-four years, and his remains were buried at East Providence, in Rhode Island. At page 59 of Lossing's history of the Empire State, a *fac simile* of Thomas Willett's signature can be found. He was the great grandfather of Col. Marinus Willett, whose name and fame are so closely and dearly associated with the history of Tryon county, during the stormy period of the revolutionary struggle.

Edward Willett (the father of Col. Willett,) was a Quaker and a farmer of moderate means, near Jamaica, on Long Island; at that homestead Marinus was born on July 31, 1740, (old style.) He was the second son and child in a family of thirteen children—the same number that was born unto his great grandfather aforementioned. That father died in 1794, at the age of ninety-four years, and, although he belonged to a denomination that was on principle, opposed to war, yet he was destined to see two of his sons, before they were eighteen, enter the military service of their country, and the one to become a prominent leader; the other to be a lieutenant on an English privateer, and the vessel on which he was engaged swept away in a hurricane in the French war of 1758, and all on board lost at sea. Marinus, until he was nearly eighteen years of age, pursued the quiet and peaceful pursuits of a farm life at his father's homestead. About that period of his life, he was moved by a spirit of self-reliance to leave the paternal roof and provide for himself. With a resolute will and a determined spirit, and with only twenty shillings in his pocket, he crossed over to New York to seek in that great city employment, and, if possible, make his fortune. It was about the time of the French war of 1758, when the colonists were greatly excited by reason of raising of troops, and the activity of the contending forces. In the early spring of that year, three English expeditions were being fitted out, with a view to attack the French at different points, and drive them out of this country. One of those expeditions, and in which New York took the greatest interest, was under the command of General Abercrombie, and to be led by him from Albany to lakes George and Champlain to attack Fort Ticonderoga, then garrisoned by 4,000 troops under Montcalm, a field marshal of France. Here were to be raised in the vicinity of New York three battalions of 900 men each, to be under the command of Col. Oliver DeLancey, a brother of the acting governor of New York.

It required no great effort to raise the requisite number of

troops, for the whole country was in commotion, and the people running over with enthusiasm. Young Willett caught the prevailing spirit of the times and, following his own ambition and the example of others, he enlisted in the army and raised a company of soldiers on Long Island among his neighbors and acquaintances. Through the influence of friends, he was appointed second lieutenant of his company, and, although not then eighteen years old, he was as full of patriotism and spirit as those of maturer years. In his "narrative" is the following description of the uniform he wore on receiving his commission as lieutenant, viz.: "Green coat trimmed with silver twist; white under clothes and black gaiters, a cocked hat with large black cockade of silk ribbon, with silver button and loop." The three battalions were raised, and the first week in May the troops left New York in sloops, ascended the Hudson to Albany, thence marched overland to Schenectady, and for two weeks were employed in patrolling the Mohawk to watch the settlements and prevent an attack from the French, if one should be made in that quarter. Orders then came to march to Lake George, where they arrived the fore part of June, and found that active preparations were there going forward to cross the lake. The last of the month Gen. Abercrombie arrived, but the soul of the expedition and the idol of the army was young Lord Howe, then thirty-four years of age; young Willett has left on record his high appreciation of the ability and soldierly qualities of that gallant officer. Soon after daybreak on Sunday, July 5th, the whole army, 16,000 strong, embarked in 1,000 boats, to cross Lake George, from its southern extremity, to its northerly shore. The day was bright and clear, the soldiers were clad in their scarlet coats, and as this armament floated upon the glassy surface of this inland sea, accompanied by martial music, while ensigns and banners floated in the breeze and glittered in the sunbeams, it looked more like a holiday occasion than an army going to battle.

At dawn the next morning, the troops landed at the north end of the lake, some four or five miles from Fort Ticonderoga, and while reaching the shore, had a slight skirmish with the occupants of a French outpost at that point, in which a couple of Frenchmen were killed. A few of the Stockbridge tribe of Indians accompanied this expedition, and as soon as they saw the two dead soldiers they rushed forward and secured their scalps. This was young Willett's first experience in witnessing the scalping process, but those scenes became familiar to him later in life. The country

between Lake George and Fort Ticonderoga was covered by a dense forest and tangled morasses; the troops formed in good order, and commenced marching by columns through the woods. Lord Howe led the advance guard, near whom was the regiment in which young Willett marched, moving forward to exposed points of danger and expecting every moment to fall into an ambush or to be met by a strong French force. The eve of battle is always one of breathless anxiety, especially to those who have never been in an engagement or witnessed one. This was Willett's first experience, and he has left an account of his feelings on this occasion; he states that he did not at this time, nor ever subsequently in his life, experience the slightest degree of fear, but on the contrary he was quite elated, and his spirits highly exhilarated as the crisis approached. The troops had not proceeded two miles before an ambush was discovered near where young Willett was marching. A sharp engagement ensued and Lord Howe was soon to the front rallying and cheering his men, when he was struck by a bullet and instantly killed. The French were dispersed, but the sudden death of Howe threw his troops into confusion and disorder. There then seemed to be no leader or any one to issue orders. The troops wandered about following incompetent guides, crossing each other's track, and firing at their own friends, mistaking them for the foe. While thus moving Willett and his companions accidentally fell in with Gen. Abercrombie, who stood under a huge tree, with a large cloak wrapped about him, while two regiments of regular troops were drawn up around his person to guard and protect him from harm. He issued no orders and the troops continued to wander the rest of the day, lost and bewildered in the woods. As night overtook them, they halted and rested until morning; on awaking it was found that most of the men had encamped near the spot where they had landed from the boats the morning before.

It was afternoon before the army was again in motion for Fort Ticonderoga, and when three miles from the fort, they halted and passed another night in the woods. The next day, which was the 8th of July, the army again started on its march for the fort, and about noon was re-enforced by six hundred Indians under the command of Sir William Johnson. But the want of a leader and competent guides had not been supplied. The same confusion, disorder and bewilderment prevailed, and before the troops were aware of it, or knew the danger they were in, they became en-

tangled in a network of fallen trees, and found they were directly under the enemy's breastworks, and exposed to a murderous fire. For four or five hours the battle raged, to the great disadvantage of the British troops, and it was not until sunset the firing ceased, and the latter retired to spend another night in the forest, expecting to renew the attack the next day, before daylight.

The next morning Lieut. Willett was awakened from a sound sleep and told that the army was rapidly making its way to their boats, with a view to recross the lake. About eight that morning the troops re-embarked, and, although there was no enemy near, great confusion and disorder prevailed, and this expedition, which, three days before, came with such pomp and splendor, returned in disgrace, leaving behind it, killed and wounded, some two thousand of its numbers. No doubt Gen. Abercrombie felt much safer when he had put thirty-eight miles of Lake George between himself and Montcalm.

In that expedition were two other persons prominent in the history of New York, and who have been more or less connected with affairs in Tryon county. The one was Gen. Philip Schuyler, whose name was given to Fort Stanwix during a portion of the revolutionary war; the other, Gen. John Bradstreet, a prominent officer in the colonial service, and who was, for years, part owner of Cosby's manor, which includes the site of Utica, and whose widow, by another marriage, was grandmother to that Martha Bradstreet who made her name famous, not only by reason of her legal and other abilities, but by the long, tedious and expensive litigation which, over half a century ago, she inflicted upon Uticans and others, regarding their land titles. Gen. Bradstreet was but a major in that expedition, yet he burned with indignation because of its shameful failure. At a council of war held at the head of the lake the very evening the troops returned from Ticonderoga, he urged the adoption of measures that would tend to wipe out or relieve the disgraceful blunder. He suggested an expedition against Fort Frontenac (now Kingston,) and offered to lead it. Some looked upon such an undertaking as wild and chimerical, and its successful execution improbable, for it was considered a strong fortress for those times, well supplied with men, cannon and ammunition; but Bradstreet urged his offer with so much earnestness that Gen. Abercrombie at last reluctantly consented to commission him to go and take with him three thousand troops. Among the number was young Willett and the regiment to which



He belonged. The destination was kept secret from all but the leading officers. They started the next day and were moved with greatest rapidity to Albany, thence to the Mohawk, and they "fairly flew," as it is said, up the river in boats, to the "Oneida carrying place," now the site of Rome. And here let me add, by way of parenthesis, that besides Schuyler and Willett, who accompanied Gen. Bradstreet to Fort Frontenac, were many others who subsequently became noted in the history of this country. Among them Nathaniel Woodhull, then a major, subsequently a general in the revolutionary army, and the first president of the provincial congress. Horatio Gates, then a captain and in the revolutionary war a brigadier general, and who captured Burgoyne and his army; Col. Charles Clinton, then stationed at Fort Herkimer, and near seventy years of age; also his two sons, James Clinton, then a captain and twenty-two years old, afterward a general, and his brother George, then nineteen years old, and afterwards for twenty-five years governor of New York; the great war governor of the infant State. Although Gen. Bradstreet moved his men up the valley with great celerity, yet it took two weeks' time for the men to pole the boats up the river to the "carrying place." On reaching this portage, Gen. John Stanwix was found with six thousand troops, having been previously ordered there to erect a formidable fort in the place of Forts Williams, Craven and Bull, destroyed two years before. The first two named forts had stood upon the banks of the Mohawk, below the bend of that river, a little further down stream than the present railroad bridge. Fort Bull was upon the lower landing of Wood Creek, some two or three miles to the westward of Forts Craven and Williams. Across this portage Bradstreet transported his men, boats and munitions of war and stores. A dam was constructed across Wood Creek, at the upper landing near the late United States arsenal, to raise the water of that stream, to aid in floating the loaded boats to Oneida Lake. Two weeks' time was occupied in making these preparations, and in removing the fallen trees and other obstructions from the creek. These movements indicated to the troops the direction of the expedition. The troops started August 14 and in six days Oswego was reached; after resting there for a few hours to repair the boats, inspect the arms and accoutrements, the troops were again on their way passing over the lake, but keeping near shore. On the third day after leaving Oswego, the troops landed on the evening of the 25th, about two miles from the fort,

and the next day commenced active preparations to take it by storm. The fort was a square one, fifteen feet high, built of stone and nearly three-fourths of a mile in circumference, and well protected by cannon; the garrison had no intimation of the approach of an enemy, until the British troops appeared before the fortress. Breastworks were erected to protect the assailants, and Willett was much of the time in exposed points of danger, and one entire night he and his men were under a constant fire of grape shot and musketry. The siege was continued for three days, and on the 29th of August the garrison surrendered; the capture included sixty cannon, sixteen mortars, a vast amount of small arms, a large quantity of powder and balls of all sorts, nine vessels and about one hundred men. The magazine was blown up, the buildings destroyed, and the whole fortress reduced to a heap of rubbish. The captured vessels were used to transport the stores to Oswego, and there burned to the water's edge. The capture of this fort was considered at the time, as one of the greatest blows inflicted upon the French in America, considering the consequences, as that fort was the storehouse from which other forts to the south were supplied. It reflected great credit upon Bradstreet and his men, although it involved incessant toil, great fatigue and hardship, and a great sacrifice of human life. When Oswego Falls (now Fulton) was reached by the troops on their return from Oswego, it took the men three days to drag the boats and stores over that portage of a mile, and so excessive was the labor, and so great the fatigue and exposure of the men in the whole expedition that near one hundred deaths occurred at that point, and when Fort Bull was reached half of the men were unfit for duty. It required four days to transport the boats and stores from Wood Creek across the portage at Rome, to the Mohawk, and by that time the men were completely exhausted. Smith's Colonial History of New York says that five hundred men died and were buried at this "carrying place." The cause of these deaths and sickness, is attributed to the stagnant water of Wood Creek, the exposure and fatigue of the men, and the haste in cooking the food.

The expedition on its return, reached Fort Stanwix September 10, and that very night young Willett was taken ill and confined to his tent until November by a dangerous illness. As before stated, that was the season Fort Stanwix was constructed. The work was commenced August 23 and completed November 15, 1758. It was a square work, bounded by what are now Dominick,



Spring and Liberty streets, and was about 20 rods westerly from the Mohawk. It was surrounded by a deep, wide ditch, with long pickets in the center, sharpened at the top, and a row of horizontal ones projected from the embankment. It was among the most formidable structures of the times and cost the British government over \$266,000.

After Lieutenant Willett partially recovered his health and strength he was put in a boat and taken down the river to Schenectady; thence overland to Albany where he remained until December 1. The ice in the meantime having left the Hudson, he went down that river in a boat and reached New York the 7th of December, just seven months to a day from the time he had left that city in such good health and high spirits to join Abercrombie's expedition. His feeble health and the wishes of his friends prevented his taking any further part in the war. In fact, that war was near its close, for the success of the British arms the next year, the taking of Quebec in September, witnessed the culminating genius and crowning glory of Wolfe, and the valor and heroic death of Montcalm, and practically put an end to French domination on this continent.

I have not learned the occupation of Col. Willett between the close of the French war and the commencement of the revolution. The eldest son writes me, that he never heard it mentioned, but that when he was a lad, a piece of household furniture was pointed out in the dwelling as the workmanship of his father, which leads to the inference that Col. Willett might have been a cabinetmaker in his early manhood; but nothing further has been ascertained. Certain it is, however, that in whatever vocations he engaged, he was always abreast of the times and kept himself well informed as to politics and the current events of the day, and was ever found arrayed on the side of freedom and the rights of man.

In 1765 occurred the popular and universal outbreak in the colonies, caused by the threatened enforcement of the odious stamp act; but for the timely repeal of that law, the revolutionary conflict in the colonies, might have been precipitated ten years sooner than it was. In October, 1765, while a colonial congress of delegates was in session in New York city, a vessel arrived in port, bringing the obnoxious stamps. The law was to go into effect November 1. The stamps were unloaded from the vessel and hurriedly conveyed to and lodged in the fort in that city, then

garrisoned by British troops. A body of men called "The Sons of Liberty" were organized and among the prominent leaders, was young Marinus Willett, then twenty-five years old. When it was known the stamps had arrived and lodged in the fort, the whole city was in commotion; a large and tumultuous assemblage convened in the present city hall park, a gallows was erected and on it was hung an effigy of Gov. Colden. Another effigy of the governor was borne by an excited and exasperated crowd through the streets to the gate of the fort where soldiers were drawn up on the ramparts, but dare not fire. The stamps were demanded of the governor who refused to give them up, whereupon his carriage was seized, his effigy set upon it, the crowd marched to the battery, spiked the cannon and there burned carriage and effigy to ashes. The house of Major James, the commander of the royal artillery was attacked and gutted and the contents destroyed by fire and the colors of the regiment carried off by the populace. The feeling was so intense and the excitement so great, the collector appointed to sell the stamps was afraid to act and resigned and no one dare use them. The people were appeased by assurances that the stamps should not be used, and in four months that law was repealed, never having been executed in any of the colonies. It was in times like these that young Willett took his first lessons in patriotism and learned to vindicate the rights of the people and prepared himself as an important factor in the revolutionary struggle which achieved American independence.

On Sunday, April 23, 1775, rumors spread through the city of New York that there had been a conflict between the people and the troops the Wednesday before at Lexington and Concord. The gale that carried that news over the land was but the slightest breeze of the approaching spirit of the storm. The feeling which incited brave old Gen. Putnam to unhitch his team in the field where he was at work, leave the plow in the furrow, mount his horse and tear along the highway for one hundred miles to beleaguered Boston was the same which then spread itself into every hamlet throughout this broad land. The people of New York city, as if moved by one impulse, proceeded to the arsenal, forced open the door, took possession of six hundred muskets with bayonets and cartridge boxes and balls, and distributed these arms among the most active of the citizens; they formed themselves into a committee of safety and assumed the control of the city government. They took possession of the custom house and of all

the public stores, cut loose two transports at the wharf, emptied the vessels laden with provisions for Boston of their contents, seized the powder house, attempted to take possession of the magazine, published a declaration that no vessel should leave the fort for Boston; formed themselves into military companies and paraded the streets, but apparently with no definite object in view.

In the midst of this general commotion orders came from the British commander for the troops to proceed to Boston. The execution of this order could easily have been prevented, but for the timidity of some who were afraid to provoke a collision. The citizens held a meeting and agreed to allow the soldiers to depart with their own arms and accoutrements, but nothing else. One fine morning news spread like wildfire that the troops were embarking and were carrying off cartloads of chests of arms. Young Willett, who was one of the most active of the patriots, started out in one direction to notify his friends what was going on; while crossing Broad street he noticed the troops with five cartloads of arms coming down that street; without waiting for aid or advice he proceeded up the street, met the carts, took the foremost horse by the head. This brought things to a halt, and the major in command came forward to learn the cause; soon a crowd collected, and some of the committee opposed, and some approved the course of young Willett. Being encouraged and advised by his friends he mounted a cart, made a brief, stirring speech which was loudly cheered. He then turned the head of the forward horse into another street, those behind followed, and all of the carts were driven to a vacant lot and a bail alley on John street, and thus the arms were prevented from leaving the city. Those arms and those taken possession of when the news of the battle of Lexington first reached the city were used by the first troops raised in New York under the orders of Congress. The troops meeting with no other obstacle marched to the wharf and embarked for Boston amid the hisses of an excited people. This prompt and decided action of the citizens struck dismay to the hearts of the adherents of the crown, gave them a foretaste of what might be expected, and at the same time, made the recruiting of troops for the colonies a much easier task.

By order of Congress, the colony of New York was required to raise four regiments, each to consist of ten companies and each company to be composed of some seventy-two men, making about 3,000 troops to be raised in New York. Of this number New

York city was to raise one regiment. Each regiment was to be commanded by a colonel, a lieutenant-colonel and a major. Alexander McDougall was colonel of the first New York regiment, and young Willett was appointed second captain. He received his appointment June 28, 1775. He was then in his thirty-fifth year, and as he says in his "narrative," his health, strength, buoyancy of spirit and enthusiasm were his principal qualifications. His company was one of the first recruited and ready to take the field. Colonel Ethan Allen, the May preceding, had captured Ticonderoga in "the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress," and this was considered the key to the gateway of Canada, and had much to do in turning the attention of Congress, Washington, General Schuyler and others in this direction, as the proper one for the invasion of that province. There was a garrison of some 500 men at St. Johns on this route to Canada; another force at Chamblee, lower down the river, and some 300 Tories and Indians at Montreal, which constituted about all of the effective troops of the British in Canada. It was believed all of these places and troops could be captured and Canada thereby prevailed upon to link its fortunes with the thirteen colonies. On the 8th of August, 1775, Willett and his men took passage in a sloop up the Hudson, and reached Albany after a passage of four days. They were armed with the muskets which Willett had taken from the enemy, as before stated. At Albany this company was joined by three others, and there reviewed by General Montgomery, who was to accompany them. Their destination was Canada, via Lake Champlain. They reached Ticonderoga in the course of two weeks, and were on the same grounds occupied by Willett when he was in the first battle seventeen years before. On the 29th of August 1,000 troops under Gen. Montgomery embarked in boats, proceeded down the lake, and on the 4th of September they were joined at Ile Aux Noix, at the foot of the lake, by Gen. Schuyler. The 6th they proceeded to St. Johns, but found it too well fortified to take it by storm, with the small force and light guns of the Americans, and the next day they returned to the island. On the 10th of the month Gen. Montgomery, with 1,000 men, again proceeded to St. Johns, and landed just at dusk two miles from the fort. A detachment of 500 men, with which was young Willett, was sent below the fort to cut off the supplies of the enemy. This expedition, by reason of the bad conduct of the colonel in command,

was unsuccessful, and again the troops returned to the island. Here they remained for a week.

When the American force was augmented to 2,000 men, and had received an additional supply of ammunition and larger guns, the army again embarked for St. Johns, under Gen. Montgomery, and late in the day landed at the place where the troops first disembarked. Again a detachment of 500 men was ordered below the fort, and this time Gen. Montgomery accompanied it, and it was successful in taking position and planting batteries. The siege slowly continued, large guns arrived and the garrison was severely annoyed. There was a fort at Chamblee, twelve miles from St. Johns, lower down the River Sorel, and on the route to Canada, garrisoned by about 170 men. A detachment was sent to lay siege to that fort, and in less than two days, on October 18th, it surrendered with 168 men, seventeen cannon, six tons of powder. The colors of the seventh regiment were also captured and sent as a trophy to Congress. This capture was of great benefit to the besiegers of St. Johns. Nevertheless that garrison held out bravely, but on the 3d of November, after a siege of fifty days, that fort surrendered, and the prize was 500 regular troops and 100 Canadians (among whom were some of the French gentry) and a large quantity of military stores. This was indeed a great success and was received by Congress and the country with feelings of delight; and well it might, for the troops were raw and undisciplined, the army supplies scant, the weather cold and rainy, the grounds where the troops encamped damp and unhealthy, yet, in spite of all, a great victory was achieved. Capt. Willett was charged with the duty of escorting the prisoners to Ticonderoga, while Gen. Montgomery pushed on with an armed force to Montreal. As soon as the prisoners were safely placed in Fort Ticonderoga, Willett hastened to Montreal, and arrived there November 22, ten days after Montgomery had reached that place. The latter ordered Capt. Willett to return to St. Johns and take the command of that fort. This showed the high appreciation in which he was held by his superior officer. Willett remained at St. Johns until in January, 1776, when the term of the enlistment of his troops having expired, he was relieved and again went to Montreal. On the 18th of February, by order of Gen. Montgomery, he left that place for Albany in charge of British officers and their families, and reached the latter place the last of the month. On the 1st of March he set out on horseback for New York, where he arrived the 5th.

The war having now assumed a severer aspect than was supposed by many it would, it was found necessary to raise more troops with longer terms of enlistment. New York was required in 1776 to raise four battalions. Of the Third New York Regiment thus raised, Peter Gansevoort of Albany was appointed colonel and Marinus Willett lieutenant-colonel. The latter received his appointment the latter part of November, 1776, and with his appointment came orders to repair to Fishkill on the Hudson to recruit for his regiment. He was diligently employed there all winter in recruiting, drilling and clothing the men, and getting ready for the coming campaign. At the opening of the spring of 1777, Col. Willitt was ordered to take charge of Fort Constitution, opposite what is now West Point. It was so called because of the measures then being taken to form a state constitution for New York. During the whole war of the revolution it was a favorite scheme of the British government to obtain control of the Hudson, establish a chain of forts along that river and keep open a communication between New York city and Canada. As soon as the ice was out of the Hudson, about the middle of March, 1777, sloops loaded with troops, started up that river to capture Forts Clinton and Montgomery and Peekskill. A body of troops landed at the latter place, set fire to the wharf and buildings, and made such a formidable demonstration as to cause the American commander at that port (Col. McDougall) to move the army stores to a place of safety, and his troops to the passes in the highlands, and to send to Col. Willett for help. The express reached the latter on Sunday, March 23, while Col. Willett's men were out parading for a field review. The troops hurried to Peekskill and took post on an eminence that commanded a full view of the surrounding country. The practiced eye of Col. Willett noticed that a detachment of 100 men was separated from the main army of the enemy by a ravine, and he conceived the project of cutting them off and capturing the detachment; he took a circuitous route, crossed fences and other obstructions, but, as it was near dark and the detachment fled so precipitately to the shipping, he was unsuccessful. He captured, however, baggage, which had been left, consisting of blankets and cloaks; a blue camlet cloak, captured on that occasion, served afterwards to make the blue stripes to the flag that was first hoisted over Fort Stanwix, as will be hereafter narrated. The enemy were thoroughly frightened and took refuge on board of the ships, weighed anchor, and by the light of the moon, the whole



squadron swept down the Hudson back to the city. Col. Willett returned to Fort Constitution and there remained until May 18, when he was ordered to Fort Stanwix. He set out with his regiment in three sloops, and, in three days, reached Albany, thence up the Mohawk in boats, and arrived at Fort Stanwix May 29, nineteen years later than his first visit under Gen. Bradstreet. Col. Gansevoort had preceded him in the arrival at that fort, and was chief in command. In 1776 Washington saw the importance of Fort Stanwix, and wrote to Gen. Schuyler, in command of the northern frontier of New York, that Fort Stanwix should be put in repair and in a state of defense, but it seems, however, that but little was done. It was known early in the year 1777 that the British plan of the campaign for that year was for an army to enter New York via Lake Champlain, proceed to Albany, and to meet Gen. Howe, who was to go up the Hudson with his forces. It was to carry out that plan and to capture the forts on the Hudson that the incursion was made to Peekskill in March, 1777, as before stated. It was a part of the same plan for another force to proceed from Canada, via Oswego, Oneida Lake and Wood Creek, capture and garrison Fort Stanwix, proceed down the Mohawk, overrun the settlements of the valley and join the other British troops at Albany. This plan, if successful, would have been the death knell of American independence, as it would have separated the New England colonies from the other provinces and put the settlements of Tryon county at the mercy of the Tories.

When Col. Willett reached Fort Stanwix he found it was greatly out of repair; the ditch was filled up, the embankments crumbled away, the pickets had rotted down and the barracks and magazine gone to ruin. It is hardly worth while to relate in this connection the difficulties attending the repairs, the inefficiency, if not the culpable heedlessness, of the engineer in charge, a detection of his blunders by Col. Willett, and his arrest and dismissal to Gen. Schuyler at Albany, and the necessity of doing over again much of the work, and how it was not completed when the enemy arrived; all of these have been pretty fully narrated in the general, as well as the local history of the times. About five p. m., August 2, batteaux loaded with supplies for the garrison and guarded by 200 men, reached the landing place on the Mohawk from down the river, and barely had time to get within the fort when an advance guard of sixty men of the enemy appeared in the skirt of the woods from the direction of Fort Bull. In fact, the captain had

carelessly lingered behind and was taken prisoner. The garrison, by this 200 addition, consisted of 750 men, with six weeks' provision, but a scanty supply of powder—enough for six weeks if only nine cannon were fired each day. For a flag, this fort was up to that time without one. The garrison heard, doubtless, in due time, in this far-off wilderness, the kind of flag Congress, on the 14th of June preceding, had adopted as the emblem of the nation that was to be, and, as necessity is the mother of invention, the troops devised the means for making a flag of the regulation style. For the white stripes shirts were cut up; to make the blue, the camlet cloak was used, captured by Col. Willett in March before, and for the red, old garments found by the garrison were improvised; some authorities say, the red was made from a petticoat, captured at the time of the camlet cloak. The army that was to come by way of Oswego, was under the command of Gen. St. Leger, of the regular army, and under him was Sir John Johnson in command of the Tories, and Brant in command of the savages—about 1,000 in all. That force started from Montreal about June 21st, proceeded down the St. Lawrence, across Lake Ontario to Oswego, where it arrived about July 25th, and left the 28th for Oneida Lake, reaching the mouth of Wood Creek August 1st. After the troops left Oswego, their progress was closely watched and daily reported to the garrison, by the friendly Oneidas, so that Col. Willett knew to a day when the army would arrive at Fort Stanwix. An advance guard of sixty men under Lieut. Bird were sent forward by St. Leger, to formally invest the fort, and that detachment arrived a little after five in the afternoon as heretofore stated. On Sunday, August 3d, the remainder of the enemy reached the upper landing on Wood Creek (the site of the late United States arsenal) and there formed into line, to march with pomp and display over the intervening space to the fort. The day was bright and clear, and the pathway over the portage of sufficient width to enable the troops to show off to good advantage. The garrison were purposely paraded on the ramparts, not to fire, but to view the class of troops they were to meet, and to observe their movements and *count their numbers*. Not a gun was fired on either side. The garrison simply watched and *counted*. The martial music was first heard, next came in sight the scarlet uniforms, and then the burnished firearms of the regular soldiers, the glittering tomahawks of the savages, and the wild feathers waving and tossing on their head gear. As they advanced the regular troops



marched with precision and stately tread, deploying to the right and left, while the Indians spread out on the flanks, and with yells and war whoops made the forest resound with their reverberations, that drowned the sound of the bugle and the drum. In the midst of all, banners, ensigns and streamers floated to the breeze, and the whole display was intended to strike terror to the hearts of the garrison, but it had the opposite effect. They comprehended the situation, and saw the kind of foe they were to meet. St. Leger placed a portion of his troops on the site of the late United States arsenal; another portion, with cannon and mortar with which to shell the fort, upon the rise of ground now occupied by St. Peter's Church. Sir John Johnson and his Tories were stationed southeast of the fort, near the bend of the Mohawk, below where the railroad bridge now crosses that stream, and out of the reach of the guns of the fort, while the Indian camps were in the woods near the site now occupied by the railroad freight house; the river a few rods easterly, prevented the garrison from escaping in that direction. It will thus be seen how closely the investure was made, and how snugly the garrison was cooped up within the fortifications. Very early on the morning of Monday, August 4, a brisk fire from the rifles of the Indians was commenced, which annoyed the garrison in their work on the parapets. The greater part of the 5th was occupied by both sides in firing at each other. Soon after dark of that evening the Indians spread themselves through the woods, completely encircling the fort, and almost the entire night kept up terrific yelling, so as to keep the garrison awake and on the *qui vive*. Early on the morning of Wednesday, August 6, it was noticed that the Indian and Sir John Johnson's camps were nearly deserted, and that the enemy were stealthily stealing along the edge of the woods, on the south side of the river, toward Oriskany. The reason for this movement was not guessed by the garrison, for the Americans were not then aware that Herkimer was coming to their relief. About eleven in the forenoon two men sent by Gen. Herkimer two days before, succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the besiegers and in getting into the fort. They brought the news of Gen. Herkimer's approach, and it was then evident that the Indians and Tories had gone down the river to intercept the coming troops. Then it was that Gen. Gansevoort resolved to make a sortie and attack the two camps that had been partially deserted. The men within the fort were paraded in a square and the intelligence of Herkimer's coming was communicated to them.

Col. Willett, who was to lead the sortie, went down into the esplanade and addressed the men substantially as follows: "Soldiers, you have heard that Gen. Herkimer is on his march to our relief. The commanding officer feels satisfied that the Tories and Queen's rangers have stolen off in the night with Brant and his Mohawks to meet him. The camp of Sir John is therefore weakened. As many of you as feel willing to follow me in an attack upon it, and are not afraid to die for liberty, will shoulder your arms and step out one pace in front." Two hundred men obeyed the impulse almost at the same moment; fifty more with a three pounder were soon added. A rain storm nearly at that instant came up, which delayed the sortie until three P. M., but as soon as the storm ceased the men issued from the sally port at a brisk pace, and rushing down on Sir John Johnson's camp, near the bend of the river, below the present railroad bridge, carried it at the point of the bayonet, drove the enemy into and across the Mohawk at that point, and captured a large amount of army stores and a number of prisoners, among whom was Col. Singleton, who was at the battle of Oriskany a few hours before, but had returned to camp in the meantime. He informed Col. Willett, as the latter states in his "narrative," that Sir John was also in camp, and fled across the river. If this was correct information, Sir John must also have returned from Oriskany, for the reliable accounts show he was in that battle. After Sir John's camp was scattered, Col. Willett turned his attention to the Indian camp, on or near the site of the present railroad freight house, and soon drove the Indians into the woods. When St. Leger, at his camp on the present site of St. Peter's Church, learned of the sortie he hurriedly crossed the Mohawk at that point and followed down stream to where "Factory Village" now is, on the opposite side from the fort, with a view to cut off Col. Willett's return. St. Leger had two brass field pieces, and, partly concealed in a thicket on the east side of the river, he opened a brisk fire on Col. Willett's men, but the latter returned it so effectively that they soon put St. Leger's force to flight and returned to the fort without the loss of a single man. Col. Willett captured twenty-one wagonloads of supplies, with five British flags, all of Sir John's papers, including his orderly book, and also letters from down the valley, which were being sent to the garrison from their friends, and which had been captured from Gen. Herkimer a few hours before, but which the enemy had not opened. The following is what Col. Willett says

in his "narrative" was done on his return to the fort: "The five flags taken from the enemy were hoisted on the flagstaff, under the Continental flag, when all the troops in the garrison, having mounted the parapets, gave three as hearty cheers as perhaps were ever given by the same number of men." That account by Col. Willett himself establishes the fact that a flag of the regulation kind, (as he calls it the Continental flag) as adopted by Congress, was raised on Fort Stanwix as early as August 6, 1777. I have not seen in any historical work that a flag as ordered by Congress was raised within the thirteen colonies prior to that time.

In the afternoon of Thursday, August 7, a white flag from the enemy approached the fort, accompanied by three officers, with a request they might enter with a message from St. Leger. Permission was granted, and, according to custom, they were first blindfolded and then conducted into the dining-room, where the windows were darkened, candles lighted, the table spread with some light refreshments, and they were then received by Col. Gansevoort in the presence of his officers. The bandage was then removed from the eyes of the British officers and the principal speaker (Major Ancram) made known his errand, the purport of which was a demand of the surrender of the fort, accompanied by intimations that if surrendered the prisoners would be treated humanely, but if taken by force St. Leger would not hold himself responsible for the acts of cruelty of the Indians. Col. Willett was deputed to reply in behalf of the garrison and no one had more fire or greater spirit or was better qualified to speak on that occasion. He looked Major Ancram full in the face and with an earnestness and emphasis that admitted of no mistake or equivocation said in substance: "This garrison is committed to our charge and we will take care of it. After you get out of the fort you may turn around and look at its outside, but *never* expect to come in again unless you come a prisoner. I consider the message you have brought a degrading one for a British officer to send and by no means reputable for a British officer to carry. For my own part, I declare that before I would consent to deliver this garrison to such a murdering set as your army, by your own account consists of, I would suffer *my body to be filled with splinters and set on fire*, as you know has at times been practiced by such hordes of women and children killers as belong to your army." These sentiments were re-echoed with applause by all officers present of

the garrison. A cessation of hostilities for three days was agreed upon. As nothing had been heard from down the valley since the battle of Oriskany the garrison was getting uneasy. They needed more ammunition and might soon need provisions. It was discussed within the fort that if Col. Willett, who was very popular in the Tryon County settlements, could show himself there a spirit of enthusiasm would be awakened and they would rally to the relief of the fort. Influenced by these considerations Col. Willett agreed to make the hazardous attempt to reach the people down the river. Accordingly, at ten o'clock at night, Sunday, August 10, he, accompanied by Lieut. Stockwell, a good woodsman, each armed with a spear eight feet long, as his only weapon, with no provisions but crackers and cheese in their pockets and a quart canteen of spirits, no baggage or blankets, stole silently out of the sally port, crossed the river by crawling on a log, and when on the opposite side of the stream, where "Factory Village" now is, it was pitch dark and they in the middle of a thick forest. In rambling about they lost their way and bearings and became alarmed by the barking of a dog not far away. They were near an Indian camp, some of the Indians having taken a position on that side of the river after the sortie of Col. Willett. They stood perfectly still by the side of a large tree, not venturing to move for hours and until the morning star appeared. They then took a northerly course and struck the Mohawk again not far from what is now known as the "Ridge," two miles north of the fort. They kept close to the river, waded in it, and some of the way crossed over from one side to the other, so as to conceal their trail and not be followed. They pursued this course for several hours and then turned easterly to strike the settlements down the river. In those days the Indian path was south of the Mohawk and seldom, if ever, was there traveling in the pathless woods north of that stream; nevertheless when night came those two dare not strike a fire or a light, lest it might attract attention of prowling Indians; and so they camped in the thicket, without fire, light, blankets or covering. At peep of day they were on their feet, although both were tired, lame and sore for the day's traveling, and night's chill, and Col. Willett's rheumatism, yet they kept on their journey, but steered more southerly, and about nine in the morning they struck a heavy windfall where were growing large patches of ripe blackberries. From this luscious fruit and the crackers and cheese and spirits the two had a hearty breakfast. The sun and points of

compass were observed and without other guides they struck Fort Dayton (now Herkimer village) about three in the afternoon, having traversed a distance of fifty miles through an unknown forest, crossing streams and morasses, climbing hills and surmounting many other obstacles. The general route those two traveled is indicated as above by Col. Willett's "narrative;" it must have been northerly of Floyd Corners, through Trenton and into Russia, Herkimer County. "Simm's Frontiersmen of New York" says that years before the revolution a hurricane began in the westerly part of Oneida County and swept through the forest in an easterly direction across the present towns of Camden and Trenton, entering Herkimer County at a place called the "dugway" in Poland, and continued onward through the towns of Russia, Salsbury and Norway—extending a distance of fifty or sixty miles in length. Its breadth ranged from 60 to 100 rods and so great was its fury that almost every tree in its course was torn up by the roots. Its traces were visible for more than half a century afterward and a portion of the ground over which that tornado passed is called "the hurricane" to this day. It was doubtless in the track of that tornado Col. Willett found those patches of berries. Jones' Annals of Oneida county, state, that in the month of that siege, a hurricane of tremendous power passed through Westmoreland from west to east—its ravages extended from Oneida Lake to Cooperstown, half a mile and in some places a mile in width, prostrating the entire forest in its sweep; the severest effects were in that town. If both of those historical accounts of tornadoes are correct, there were two of them, six or seven years apart, passing over this county, one north and the other south of the Mohawk.

On the arrival of Col. Willett and Lient. Stockwell at Fort Dayton, it was ascertained that Gen. Schuyler had ordered a brigade of Massachusetts troops, stationed some ten miles above Albany, to the relief of Fort Stanwix, and that Gen. Arnold was to be in command. Having rested for one night, Col. Willett and Lient. Stockwell started early the next morning for Albany, on horseback to meet the troops and interview Gen. Arnold. The troops were met the same evening on their way. It was then learned that the First New York Regiment was also on its way to relieve the fort. On Saturday, August 16, Gen. Arnold and Col. Willett reached Fort Dayton, where the troops were assembled; on the way from Albany, Col. W. stopped to see Gen. Herkimer

at his residence near Little Falls, who that day had his leg amputated by reason of the injury in the battle at Oriskany ten days before; the latter died next day after the amputation. About the time that Col. Willett started down the valley for assistance, Walter N. Butler, a tory, who was in the battle of Oriskany, and was in the siege of Fort Stanwix, also went down to the Mohawk Settlements to rally his Tory friends. A number of them had assembled by appointment on Friday evening, August 15, at the house of one Shoemaker, one of the king's justices of the peace of Tryon county, there to be addressed by Butler. Shoemaker then resided at or near what is now Mohawk village, nearly opposite Herkimer village. The garrison of Fort Dayton received news of the assemblage and a detachment was sent to surround the house and capture the inmates. When Butler was in the midst of his harangue, the detachment swooped down upon the assemblage, and captured the whole posse, consisting of six or eight soldiers, and as many Indians, besides a number of tories, among whom was an ignorant, halfwitted fellow by the name of Han Yost Schuyler. Gen. Arnold at once ordered a court martial to try Butler and Schuyler as spies, for being found within the American lines. Col. Willett was appointed judge advocate; the two were convicted and sentenced to be executed. Gen. Arnold approved the sentence and ordered the execution to take place the next morning. Through the intercession of friends, the sentence of Butler was respited and he sent to Albany as a prisoner. Through carelessness or treachery he subsequently escaped and fled to Canada, and for years thereafter was the greatest scourge, by reason of his temper and cruelties ever inflicted upon the County of Tryon, and his name has been handed down through history, as the worst hated, and most detested of all the tories of those times. As to Han Yost Schuyler, his brother and widowed mother strongly interceded in his behalf and as he was a well known Tory and regarded by the Indians with a sort of superstition they always entertain toward such unfortunates, Gen. Arnold conceived the idea of using him to frighten away the besiegers at Fort Stanwix. That *ruse* and its success, have been so often told, that the story need not be repeated here; suffice it to say that by reason of the exaggerated stories Han Yost communicated to St. Leger, of the near approach of an overwhelming relieving force, the siege was abandoned August 22, and the besiegers hurriedly returned by the route they came 20 days be



fore, leaving behind the bombardier asleep in the bomb proof, St. Leger's private writing desk, the tents of the soldiers, provisions, artillery, ammunition, the entire camp equipage, and large quantities of other stores.

Han Yost Schuyler fled with the fugitives as far as Oneida Lake; there he found means to leave them and to return to the fort, and apprise Col. Gansevoort of the *ruse*. This was the first notice the latter received of Gen. Arnold's approach, and explained why St. Leger had left in such haste. At four o'clock of the afternoon of the next day, Gen. Arnold arrived with his men, and with four brass field pieces, banners displayed, drums beating, music playing, they marched into the fort amid the booming of cannon, the discharge of musketry and the cheers of the garrison. The successful defense of Fort Stanwix to which Col. Willett so largely contributed, affixed the seal to American independence. Within two months thereafter, Burgoyne and his army laid down their arms on the field of Saratoga. Ticonderoga was abandoned, the British gave up the control of the Hudson and retreated down the river and New York was redeemed. These victories and others, commencing at that lone fortress in the then far off wilderness, sent a glow of joy throughout the thirteen colonies, and paved the way for France in less than four months thereafter to acknowledge our independence. The British press spoke in the highest praise of Col. Willett's achievements, of his journey down the river through pathless woods in quest of succor. Congress voted him a sword, and the next October, one was sent him, accompanied by a copy of the resolution of Congress, and a complimentary letter from John Hancock, president of that body. That testimonial is now in the possession of a descendant of Col. Willett, and a description of it is furnished me as follows: "It is one of ordinary length, rapier kind, running to a sharp point, and of Damascus steel; the handle is gold, platina and other metal, and on it is this inscription, '*Congress to Col. Willett, Oct., 1777.*'" After St. Leger's retreat Col. Willett passed several months in comparative inactivity. He completed the unfinished works of Fort Stanwix, and drilled the troops stationed there. The last of September, Col. Gansevoort having returned to that fort, Col. Willett set out to visit his family at Fishkill, where he arrived October 4, the very day the British captured Forts Clinton and Montgomery, and thereby obtained for a short time, control of the Hudson. Col. Willett remained for awhile in that vicinity,

assisting in the defense of the country about that river. That fall he visited the army under Washington, a dozen of miles from Philadelphia, and remained there until January, 1778, when he returned to Fort Stanwix. Wearied with this inactive and monotonous life, he set out in June, 1778, to join the army under Washington; on reaching Fishkill, he found there Gen. Gates, and on the 21st of that month, news came that the British had evacuated Philadelphia. As Gen. Gates had important information to communicate to Washington, Col. Willett was sent as the confidential messenger. He remained with the main army, and took part in the battle of Monmouth on the 28th of June, and continued with that army the rest of the year 1778.

The great campaign for the year 1779, was to be an invasion of the country in the western part of New York, occupied by the Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca Indians. Those tribes had taken sides with the British, and from their territory many of the incursions into the Mohawk settlements were planned; their rich agricultural fields had afforded support to the armies, and to the Indian families, while the war was thus carried on against the colonists. Those tribes possessed large cultivated fields, of great productiveness, also extensive gardens and orchards, and lived in frame houses, and had acquired some of the arts, and were in the enjoyment of many of the comforts of civilized life. They raised in profusion apples, pears, peaches, plums, melons, squashes, grapes, cranberries, beans and tobacco; corn was raised in large quantities; ears of that grain measured twenty-two inches in length; the first sweet corn ever seen in New England was carried thither from the country of the Six Nations by a soldier in his knapsack, during the war of the revolution. This Indian country included some fifty to sixty towns, all rudely built for those times. Washington, Schnyler and others and Congress felt that a country which furnished so much aid and comfort to the enemy, should be as thoroughly devastated as had been the valley of the Mohawk. To accomplish that purpose, two armies, one under Gen. Sullivan was to proceed from Pennsylvania, to meet another under Gen. Clinton at or near the junction of Tioga and Susquehanna rivers, below Newtown, now near Elmira, and thence proceed via Seneca and the other inland lakes into the heart of the Indian country of western New York. In April of that year, and as a part of the same campaign, some 600 troops, in charge of Cols. Willett and Van Schaack, were ordered from Fort Stanwix to go down Wood



Creek and into Oneida Lake to the Onondaga River, and thence into the country of the Onondagas, to lay their settlements waste, destroy their buildings and inflict the same kind of chastisement upon them that had been inflicted upon the white settlements. This expedition started from Fort Stanwix April 18, and was gone six days, traveling 180 miles, and most effectually accomplishing the work it set out to perform. About a dozen villages, extending a distance of some ten miles along the valley of the Onondaga streams, were burned, grain, cattle and other property destroyed, the swivel of their council house disabled, and the destruction of the settlements rendered complete. After this work Col. Willett returned to Canajoharie and then joined Gen. Clinton's army, for its destination to meet Gen. Sullivan. Four weeks Gen. Clinton was occupied in making the needed preparations; in August he and his army went overland to the head of Otsego Lake, the head waters of Susquehanna River, taking 200 boats from Canajoharie, each drawn by four horses, to that lake. The waters of the lake and river were raised by a dam, and the loaded boats were launched, to be carried down the river by the rushing waters. For the energy and ability displayed by Col. Willett in the part he took to start that flotilla, Gen. Clinton paid him a high compliment in a letter to Gen. Schuyler. The two armies of Gens. Sullivan and Clinton united, and on the 29th of August was fought the bloody and hotly contested battle of Newtown, in which the Indians under Brant and the Tories under Sir John Johnson and Col. John Butler were totally routed. The enemy fought with desperation, for they were fighting for their homes, and they knew that defeat meant the desolation of their country and the destruction of their firesides. There was no battle and not much opposition after that. Sullivan's army, 5,000 strong, overran the entire hostile country and laid it waste, leaving hardly a green, living or movable thing on the whole track of the invaders. They found it a garden, but left it a desert. Over forty towns, which included 700 buildings, were burned to ashes, 160,000 bushels of corn were destroyed, elegant gardens laid waste, 1,500 bearing fruit trees leveled to the ground, cattle killed or driven off, and the inhabitants compelled to seek safety in flight. It broke the backbone of the Iroquois confederacy, from which it never recovered. That campaign has passed into history as the "Sullivan's expedition." The ravages of the Indian country, made by that expedition, incited those hostile tribes and the Tories to retaliate in kind and to wreak their

vengeance the next year upon the white settlements of Tryon county. After that expedition Col. Willett again returned to the main army and rendered himself useful in connection therewith. In the winter of 1779-80 he led a detachment of 500 men, and with one field piece, crossed at night on the ice over to Staten Island and captured seventeen wagonloads of stores, which at that particular juncture were of great service to the troops. The same winter he led another expedition to Paulus Hook, (Jersey City,) captured a redoubt and all of the cattle of the British. It was the celerity of Col. Willett's movements, the fertility of his resources and his untiring activity that rendered him such a valuable aid to the patriot cause and so much dreaded by the enemy. He was in that war to the Americans what Sheridan was to the North and Stonewall Jackson to the South in the recent civil war. Wherever he commanded he inspired the confidence and enthusiasm of his men, and they generally followed wherever he dared to lead.

During the year 1780 and while the Indians and Tories were committing terrible ravages in Tryon county, Col. Willett was with the main army in Westchester county, but nothing of importance occurred, so far as he was concerned. The County of Tryon during the first six years of the war, suffered more severely than any other extent of territory within the thirteen colonies. Within its borders more campaigns were performed, more battles fought, more people murdered and more dwellings burned than in any other section. The Board of Supervisors of that county, reported to the Legislature in December, 1780, that during the war 700 buildings had been burned, 354 families had abandoned their homes and removed from the country, 613 persons had deserted to the enemy, 197 had been killed, 121 taken captives, and 1,260 farms were uncultivated by reason of the enemy, and this did not include some five or six other settlements. Other statistics show that thousands of horses and cattle had been killed or stolen, millions of bushels of grain destroyed, and that 300 women had been made widows, and 2,000 children made orphans. These ravages and misfortunes, earned for the valley of the Mohawk, the title of "the dark and bloody ground," and well nigh extinguished the hopes and crushed out the spirit of the people. The year 1781 opened gloomily upon the inhabitants of that valley. In this emergency, Gov. Clinton bethought himself of one who could revive the drooping spirits of the people, whose presence

would arouse great enthusiasm and be a tower of strength in the valley. That one was Col. Marinus Willett. At the urgent solicitation of Gov. Clinton and with great reluctance, Col. Willett consented to leave the main army, and make his headquarters in the valley to take command of the levies assigned to that branch of the State service. His strong sympathies with the suffering people, his acquaintance with Indian methods and modes of warfare, and the assurances of Gov. Clinton that his presence was needed, induced him to undertake the laborious and hazardous service. He has left on record the assertion that one year of such work was more trying and laborious than all of the other years of the war. The fore part of July, 1781, Col. Willett established his headquarters at Canajoharie, and it was not long thereafter before his services were called into requisition.

In the year 1781 there were twenty-four forts between Schenectady and Fort Dayton, (now Herkimer village), into which the inhabitants of the valley sought refuge when pressed by the enemy, or otherwise threatened with danger. Some of these forts were nothing more than dwellings within picketed inclosures; nevertheless they afforded a comparative security against sudden irruptions from the foe. Early that year the whole northern and western frontiers of New York were threatened with invasions, and the people were weighed down by a deeper feeling of unrest and despondency than at any former period during the war. The country between Albany and Lake Champlain was suffering for want of provisions and in danger of raids from Canada in that direction, while Brant and his dusky warriors were hovering about the valley of the Mohawk, ready to pounce upon any soldier or inhabitant who was unfortunate enough to be caught away from his comrades or the forts. It was in the spring of that year that Brant and his Indians, while prowling around Fort Stanwix and its vicinity, picked up and carried off some thirty of the garrison of that fort. In May of the same year that Fort was so badly injured by fire and flood that it was abandoned, and the men removed to other quarters. It was in the midst of this deep gloom and general discouragement that Col. Willett consented to take command of the northwestern frontier and make his headquarters in the Mohawk valley. The fore part of July, 1781, he established himself at Canajoharie, where he had one hundred and twenty men; at Fort Herkimer he had about twenty more, at Ballston some thirty, and at Catskill twenty; in other parts of the valley were

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less than one hundred more. These did not include the militia nor the new levies soon expected to be raised. The country he was to defend was all of New York west of Albany county, and included Catskill and other exposed points along the Hudson. He was not left long without occupation; even while establishing his headquarters, a force of three or four hundred, mostly Indians, was on its way from Canada to attack the Mohawk settlements. Capt. John Dockstader was a bitter Tory, and, some time before, had fled from that part of the country and collected the above Indians and Tories to return and raid his old neighbors and acquaintances, and in hopes, if successful, of becoming a major. This raiding party took the route from Canada, through the Seneca country, traveled by the "Sullivan expedition" of two years before, thence struck off for the head waters of the Susquehanna to the Mohawk valley settlements, in the direction of what is now Sharon Springs. Dockstader and his men, pursued their course with such quietness and stealth, that they reached without being discovered, a dense cedar swamp of some seventy-five acres, about half a mile southwest of what is now Sharon Centre, some two miles east of Sharon Springs. Upon a slight rise of ground within that swamp, concealed from view, those raiders encamped for the first night, and most of them started off the next morning, Monday, July 9th, to attack Corrytown, a small settlement of a dozen houses, six or eight miles distant in a northeasterly direction, in what is now the town of Root, in Montgomery county, three miles south of Spraker's Basin, and about a dozen miles southeasterly from Canajoharie, where Col. Willett was located. It so happened that early on the same morning, that those Indians and Tories left that swamp for Corrytown, Col. Willett, without knowing that an enemy was in that direction, sent out from Canajoharie, a scouting party of thirty-five men, under Capt. Gross, to patrol the country around Sharon Springs, then a strong Tory settlement known as New Dorlach, and to procure beeves and other supplies for the garrison, also to see if an enemy was near. The fact that New Dorlach was a Tory settlement, was doubtless the incentive for Dockstader, to make that swamp his headquarters and hiding place, for his Tory sympathizers were undoubtedly apprised of his coming, and kept it a secret. The same feeling probably moved Col. Willett to be suspicious of that locality, and to make it the base of his supplies. Capt. Gross had been gone but a few hours on his scouting expedition, when the garrison at

Canajoharie, discovered about noon, fire and smoke in the direction of Corrytown. The Indians had commenced their work of pillage and destruction. Col. Willett at once dispatched to Corrytown, Capt. McKean, with sixteen levies and with orders to collect as many militia on the route, as he could gather, and at the same time he sent a messenger post haste after Capt. Gross to inform him of the fire, and of the probable proximity of the enemy in New Dorlach, with instructions to discover their location. Capt. Gross struck the trail the enemy made, when it left the swamp for Corrytown, and by its width, estimated the number to be three or four hundred; he sent two or three of his men to follow the trail to its starting place, while he retired to a safe and convenient point of observation, and waited for his men to return; after following the trail about a mile, the men reached the encampment in the swamp, discovered a large number of packs, and that some of the Indians left behind were engaged in cooking, as if expecting the main body to return for the night. They, undiscovered, stole a blanket from one of the tents and then hurried back to report to Capt. Gross. The latter at once sent a man on horseback to Col. Willett. In the meantime the latter was busy all the afternoon in collecting the militia and getting ready to start at a moment's notice. Capt. McKean reached Corrytown in time to quench the flames in one or two of the dwellings after the enemy had left, but not in time, nor would he have been able had he arrived sooner, to save the dozen other buildings, which Dockstader and his men burned to the ground, nor to have protected the inhabitants, which were murdered or carried away captives by that superior force. There was a picketed block house in that settlement into which a few hurried and were saved, while others sought safety by hiding in the woods, or by being fleet of foot. Cattle and horses were killed or driven away, and, when the Indians left, about 4 p. m., they left behind them a sad and sickening scene of desolation. When word from Capt. Gross reached Col. Willett it was near night, and he at once set off for the swamp, with orders for Capt. McKean and Capt. Vedder at Fort Paris (two miles northeast of Fort Plain) to follow. It was Col. Willett's intention to reach the camp in the night, surprise and attack it before daylight, but the woods were thick, with no road better than a bridle path; the night was dark, and the guide lost his way, so that it was six in the morning before Col. Willett and Capts. McKean and Gross reached the camp. In the meantime the enemy had news of the approach

and had changed their ground to a more advantageous position, about one-eighth of a mile northwest of Sharon Centre, instead of one-half a mile to the southwest, where they encamped. Col. Willett divided his forces into two parallel lines, or in the form of a crescent and placed them in a ravine and sent a small detachment over the brow of the hill to show themselves to the enemy with orders at the first fire to retreat and draw the Indians into the ravine—much like the trap into which Herkimer was caught at the battle of Oriskany. The decoy succeeded and the Indians came rushing on, yelling, whooping, hallooing, until they met Col. Willett's men; there they were checked, the tide of battle turned, and after a sharp fight of nearly two hours, the enemy fled, Col. Willett following vigorously in the pursuit, calling on his men to follow, while he waved his hat and shouted at the top of his voice, "Come on boys, the day is ours. I can catch in my hat all the bullets the rascals can send," and at the same time, gave orders in a loud tone of voice, as if directing a detachment to reach the rear of the enemy to cut off their retreat. The Indians and Tories were thoroughly frightened and fled in great confusion, leaving behind the plunder and booty taken the day before, killing some of their captives and hurrying off with the rest. They also left behind forty of their own dead and all of their camp equipage. The victory was complete, and produced inspiring effect upon the Americans. The loss of Col. Willett was five men, among whom was the brave and meritorious Capt. McKean and his son. The captain was shot in the battle, but died after he had reached Canajoharie. Dockstader and his men hurriedly left the valley, he without earning the commission of major, which he expected, and that party did not again molest the Mohawk settlements. A brief sketch of some of the incidents attending this invasion will be sufficient to indicate the trials and sufferings the inhabitants of Tryon county passed through during the whole period of the revolutionary war. The attack upon Corrytown was so wholly unexpected the settlers were not prepared for it: most of them were at work in the fields, and but few had an opportunity to reach the picketed inclosure. Jacob Dieffendorf, a pioneer settler, with his two young sons, were at work in the field; one of the sons, 12 or 14 years old, was tomahawked and scalped, and after lying several hours insensible, bathed in his blood, he crawled to the picketed enclosure, without knowing what he was doing. On reaching his friends he imploringly raised his hands and besought



them not to kill him; his wounds were dressed, and he recovered and lived for several years thereafter. The other son was taken captive and carried to the cedar swamp, and when the Indians were routed by Col. Willett, young Diefendorf was scalped and left for dead. He covered himself with the leaves of the trees to keep off the flies from his wound, and when discovered, covered and begrimed with blood, he was at first supposed to be an Indian. He was taken back to his friends, his wounds dressed, and, although his head was five years in healing, he eventually recovered and became one of the wealthiest farmers in Montgomery county. He died in 1859 at the age of 85 years. A girl a dozen years old, was also taken prisoner to that cedar swamp, and when the enemy were defeated and found they could not take their young captive with them to Canada, the Indians took her scalp, as they did not wish to lose the bounty the British government had offered for scalps. When the settlers at Corrytown saw the enemy approaching, a husband and father started from his house with his family to reach the picketed block house. He had a small child in one hand and his gun in the other, followed by his wife with an infant in her arms and several children on foot hold of her dress. A savage fired at them, the bullet passed near the head of the child in the father's arms and lodged in the pickets. That was the last family that reached the fort. As before stated, the Indians plundered all of the buildings in the neighborhood and set them on fire, and all where burned except one.

The news of Dockstader's defeat was received with great joy throughout the country. The common council of the city of Albany, on the 19th of the month the battle was fought, passed complimentary resolutions in favor of Col. Willett and his officers and men for their bravery and intrepidity in that battle and voted to Col. Willett the freedom of that city. That battle took place on July 10, 1781, and has passed into history as "the battle of Sharon." Its centennial anniversary was observed in July, 1881, by the inhabitants of that part of the State. As I learn from residents of that locality that cedar swamp yet remains, covered with trees, about as impassable as ever, except in very dry seasons or in the coldest of weather, when the grounds and the small lake in the center are frozen hard. Soon after that battle news came to Col. Willett at one o'clock at night that a party of fifty or sixty Indians were hovering around a settlement five or six miles distant. In an hour's time he had a captain of militia company,

with seventy men, in pursuit, but the Indians wisely took to their heels. It was by reason of such promptness and the celerity of Col. Willett's movements, his dash in battle, and his seeming ubiquity that the Indians had such a dread and fear of him; they believed he possessed supernatural powers; they called him "the devil."

During that summer the enemy appeared at intervals in small numbers in different parts of the valley, but nothing occurred to dignify it with the name of an invasion or a raid.

Over three months had passed since the irruption of Dockstader; the farmers had gathered their crops, filled their granaries, and partially settled down into the belief that the year 1781 would pass along without any more formidable invasions of the valley, with its attendant consequences. If such a hope was entertained, it proved illusory, and the expectation was doomed to disappointment. In the forenoon of Wednesday, October 24th, a hostile force of 700 men, composed of British, Indians and Tories under the command of Majors Ross and Walter N. Butler was first discovered in the valley near Argusville in Schoharie county, making its way towards Corrytown. That expedition was organized at Bucks, now called Carleton Island in the St. Lawrence, and thence it proceeded across Lake Ontario to Oswego, thence by the water route to Oneida Lake as far as Chittenango Creek; at that point, the boats were secreted, and the men struck across the country through Onondaga, Madison and Otsego counties, to the vicinity in Schoharie, where first discovered. The enemy proceeded to Corrytown, plundered the dwellings, made prisoners of the inhabitants, but avoided setting fires, lest they might alarm the garrison of Col. Willett, and thereby be frustrated in accomplishing their undertaking. From that point they proceeded to the Mohawk, followed it down on the south side, to Fort Hunter, where Schoharie Creek empties into the river; they arrived at that point at nightfall, crossed over the creek into what was then called Warrensburgh, now the town of Florida in Montgomery county. Fearing they were going too far to the eastward, they crossed the next morning to the northerly side of the Mohawk, east of Tribe's Hill, and by a circuitous route went to Johnstown and the old baronial hall of Sir William Johnson, where they arrived at noon Thursday, October 25th. The whole track of the enemy was marked by the murder or capture of inhabitants, stealing of horses and cattle, plunder of dwellings and destruction



of property. Late in the afternoon of the day the enemy was seen moving down the river towards Fort Hunter, the news of their march was brought to Col. Willett; he immediately mustered all the spare forces at hand, sent orders to other points for the militia to follow on after him, while he crossed to the south side of the Mohawk in pursuit. He marched all night, and reached Fort Hunter, some twenty miles east of Canajoharie, in the morning, and was proceeding to cross Schoharie Creek, and follow the enemy into the town of Florida, when he learned that the latter was on their way to Johnstown. The Mohawk was deep at that point and not fordable and Col. Willett was obliged to procure boats or floats to get his men over that river, so that it was noon before he reached the north side. His troops were at once formed in marching order and set off in haste for Johnstown. Col. Willett had 416 men; the enemy about double that number. They reached Johnstown about the middle of the afternoon. Col. Willett sent a small detachment under command of Major Rowley to the east to attack the enemy in the rear, while he engaged them in front. A sharp engagement ensued, resulting in driving the enemy into the edge of the woods near by, when of a sudden, without any known or explainable reason, Willett's men were seized with a panic and fled from the field, leaving a cannon in possession of the enemy, and some of them seeking refuge in a stone church. The efforts of Col. Willett to rally them were in vain. At that unfortunate time Major Rowley's force came upon the enemy's rear, attacked them with great vigor, throwing them into confusion and driving them from the field. They, however, rallied, and in turn drove back Major Rowley, and the two contending forces were alternately defeated, and so the fighting continued until sunset. In the meantime Col. Willett succeeded in gathering his men and returned to the fight. At dark the enemy was totally beaten, driven further into the woods, and sought safety on the top of a mountain, six miles distant to the north. After dark Col. Willett procured lights and buried the dead. His loss was forty killed; he took fifty prisoners, from whom it was learned that the enemy intended to move the next day upon Stone Arabia, in the vicinity of what is now known as Palatine Bridge, with a view to obtain provisions. Col. Willett moved his men to that locality, while he sent a scouting party to follow the enemy and keep track of their movements. By this scouting party he learned that the enemy were moving north-

westerly, nearly parallel with the Mohawk, toward the northerly part of Herkimer county, as if it was the intention to get out of the reach of the Americans, and then strike down to the Mohawk and across the country to Chittenango Creek, where the boats had been left. To prevent such a movement, Col. Willett, on the morning of Saturday, October 27, sent a detachment to destroy the boats while he marched his men to Fort Herkimer, on the south side of the river, some two miles east of Herkimer village, there to await developments, still keeping spies on the trail of the enemy, with orders to send swift messengers to him at every turn of affairs. Majors Ross and Butler marched their men at a slow pace, for they were hemmed in the woods, short of provisions, and exposed to great dangers. On Monday, October 29, they encamped in a thick wood in the north part of what is now the town of Norway, about half a mile from Black Creek—an encampment which has passed down by traditions as “Butler’s ridge.” Thus it will be seen, by looking on a map of New York, the slow progress that was made after the battle of Johnstown, some forty miles distant. During the four days the enemy was on that route the weather was cold and each man had only one-half pound of horse flesh each day on which to subsist. On the 28th the detachment returned, which Col. Willett had sent to the boats, without having accomplished (for some reason,) the work it was sent to do. Late in the afternoon of Sunday, October 28, Col. Willett received word that the enemy were striking still deeper into the wilderness, as if to make their escape by crossing West Canada Creek miles above Trenton Falls, and thence steer their course through a pathless forest, via the Black River to Carleton Island. To frustrate that move, a short time before dark of the same day, Col. Willett selected 400 of his best troops with sixty Oneida Indians, who had that day joined his forces, and taking five days’ provisions, he started out, crossed the Mohawk, and followed up the valley of West Canada Creek and encamped that night in the woods above Fort Dayton (now Herkimer village).

Early the next morning, Col. Willett and his men were astir, following up the easterly side of the creek, to what is now Middleville, marching in the midst of a driving snow storm, and pushing their way in a northeasterly direction, into the north part of the town of Norway, and at dark, encamped for the night in a dense wood, about a mile, as it turned out, from the enemy’s

encampment. A scouting party was at once sent forward to discover the location of the foes, and to ascertain whether Col. Willett was in their front or rear; that party soon returned with the news of the proximity of the retreating forces, and at first, Col. Willett thought to make a night attack, but as the enemy had a supply of bayonets which his men had not, he concluded to wait until the morrow. At break of day, Tuesday, October 30, the Americans were again on foot, a scout having been sent ahead to learn what the enemy were doing. The main body of the men of Ross and Butler were up as early as the pursuers and on the march, a detachment being in the rear as a guard, and to bring on the baggage and provisions; that scouting party got in between the advance and rear forces, and one of them was shot while the others hurried back to Willett with the news. The pursuers were hurriedly pushed forward, and overtook the enemy near Black Creek, an engagement ensued, in which the enemy were compelled to retreat; frequent skirmishes took place all the way to West Canada Creek, some two or three miles, the enemy seeming perfectly discouraged and demoralized and only too anxious to get out of reach and harm's way. They reached West Canada Creek, hurriedly crossed, and when on the opposite shore rallied and another sharp skirmish ensued—the creek separating the combatants. In that engagement Walter N. Butler was shot and instantly killed, as Col. Willett says, the ball entered his eye and passed out the back part of his head. Accounts differ as to whether Butler was killed by a random shot, or by one taking deliberate aim, and also as to whether he was scalped. The most reliable account is, that he was killed by a stray bullet and that he was not scalped, as Col. Willett makes no mention of it in his narrative, but simply says, “he was shot dead.” Thus perished Walter N. Butler, the greatest scourge, the most cruel and inhuman monster, and the worst hated Tory, who inflicted his presence upon the border settlements of Pennsylvania and New York. His father later on offered a reward for the recovery of the body, but it was never restored to him, nor would the American soldiers accord it a burial; they left it to bleach and rot upon the identical ground where it had fallen. The news of this victory and death spread through the valley, about the time that the tidings came of the capture of the army of Cornwallis at Yorktown: yet that surrender did not give more, if so much, joy to the inhabitants of the valley, as the assurance that Walter N.

Butler had passed from earth. After the shooting of Butler the enemy fled in confusion, and at a rapid gait, leaving behind packs and all that encumbered their retreat, and struck off through the dense and pathless wilderness in the direction of the valley of the Black River. After seven days' journey, of innumerable sufferings and untold hardships, they reached Carleton Island, eighty miles distant, in a famishing condition, many of the men who crossed Canada Creek having perished by the way. Col. Willett and his men crossed that stream and followed in pursuit until nearly dark; but as the Americans were getting short of provisions, and as the enemy retreated with such rapidity, it was deemed prudent to return, as the victory was as complete as if the whole of the enemy's forces were captured. On the return to recross the creek, the Americans discovered a five-year-old white girl near a fallen tree, crying piteously. She had been stolen from her parents, but as the Indians did not wish to be further encumbered with her, they left the waif where she was found, near the fallen tree. The little girl was taken in charge and restored to her friends down the valley. The place of the enemy's crossing on West Canada Creek is about five miles up the stream from Gang, or Hinkley's Mills, and nearly double that distance above Trenton Falls. It is near the line between the towns of Russia and Ohio in Herkimer county. At that point the stream is fordable for two or three miles, owing to the rifts and to small and large stones in the channel of the creek. It is now known as "Hess's Rifts," and the crossing place is called by some "Butler's Ford."

In the pocket of Butler when his dead body was found was the same commission he exhibited on his trial as a spy four years before at the time Col. Willett acted as judge advocate some ten days after the battle of Oriskany. Let me state in this connection and by way of parenthesis that Dr. William Petry (grandfather of Judges Robert and Samuel Earl of Herkimer,) was surgeon general in Col. Willett's regiment, appointed in April, 1781, and was in this expedition; and was all through the war, and was wounded at the battle of Oriskany four years before.

The loss of the enemy in this October incursion of Ross and Butler was never known. Col. Willett's official dispatches contain the following: "The fields of Johnstown, the brooks and rivers, the hills and mountains, the deep and gloomy marshes and dense woods through which they had to pass, these only could tell; and perhaps the officers who detached them on this expedition." Gen.

Heath, the American commander of the northern frontier, issued a general order in November, 1781, commending Lord Sterling, Gen. Stark and others for their services that year, and mentions the battle of Johnstown, the defeat of Ross and Butler and the death of the latter, and adds: "The general presents his thanks to Col. Willett whose address, gallantry and persevering activity exhibited on this occasion do him highest honor."

This expedition closed the war in the valley of the Mohawk for that year. In fact, there was no longer much of anything left in that valley for a hostile expedition to destroy; the inhabitants had lost pretty much all, except the soil they cultivated, most of their fine farms had been turned into a wilderness waste, except in the vicinity of the forts, and at times hunger stared the settlers in the face, and famine seemed inevitable. These resistances in the valley, may seem unimportant, because no great battles were fought, and no great victories won; nevertheless they stemmed the tide of the enemy's advance into the interior, and kept them back from the towns of the Hudson, and prevented the establishment of a chain of forts along that river, which was a favorite scheme and a long cherished hope and object of the British.

For the year 1782, Col. Willett remained at his headquarters on the Mohawk, but no considerable force of the enemy appeared at any one time, to molest the inhabitants of Tryon county. Small and scattering bodies of Indians appeared at various places, causing trouble and creating alarm, but no very serious disturbances occurred. The exigencies of the times required vigilance and alertness on the part of Col. Willett, and the sending of squads of troops in the night, several miles into the wilderness, or into neighboring localities, to drive out the enemy, or to discover if one was near, yet the campaign of 1782 closed without any important event in Tryon county. The substantial fighting of the war ended with the surrender of Cornwallis, and negotiations for peace between the two countries were commenced in Europe near the close of the year of 1782. For nearly a year there was an armistice, nevertheless, none of the efforts of the American officers were relaxed, to preserve the discipline of the troops and to keep the country in an attitude of defense. The recruiting of New York State troops had been successful that year, by reason of the legislature offering a bounty of money, instead of a bounty in lands; so that at the close of the year 1782, Col. Willett had a regiment of 400 State troops. Having prepared winter barracks

for his men, inoculated many of them for small pox, and built a log hut for himself, Col. Willett set out the last of November for Albany. Thence he went to Fishkill for his wife, with the intention to take her to his winter quarters during the winter of 1782-3. At that time Gen. Washington's headquarters were at Newburgh, opposite Fishkill Landing, and there Col. Willett went to pay his respects to the commander-in-chief; he remained to dinner, and as he left the table and arose to depart, Washington invited Col. Willett into the office, and unfolded a secret plan of sending an expedition the then coming winter to surprise and capture Oswego. Col. Willett was asked to lead the expedition. The latter had made arrangements for passing the winter with his wife in comfortable quarters, and it was with reluctance that he hesitated to accept the request of the commander-in-chief. He departed with a promise to think of it, and let Washington soon know the result of his conclusions. A correspondence ensued, and as Gen. Washington desired to keep the matter a profound secret, the correspondence on his part was in his own handwriting. Col. Willett accepted the position. At that time Oswego was one of the most formidable defenses on this continent, and had given the enemy by its possession, and that of Niagara, great advantage during the war. The whole expedition was to be one of secrecy, for upon it depended its success, and the positive instructions of Washington to Col. Willett were, not to attack nor attempt to capture Oswego, except by surprise. On Saturday, the 8th of February, 1783, the troops were suddenly assembled at Fort Herkimer, and a large portion of them supplied with snow shoes, as they had no beaten track to follow, and the snow was from two and one-half to three feet deep. The men thus provided went ahead and made a track for a cavalcade of 200 sleighs that followed, carrying the remainder of the troops and the baggage. The expedition reached Oneida Lake Sunday night, February 9, and crossed it that night on the ice, and arrived at Fort Brewerton, at the foot of the lake, where the sleighs were left, and the men followed the river on ice to Oswego Falls (now Fulton) and arrived there about 2 p. m., February 10. There they went into the woods, made ladders and the prospect of stealing unawares upon the garrison and capturing the fort was everything that could be desired. At 10 o'clock that night the expedition reached a point of land about four miles from the fort; here on account of the weakness of the ice on Oswego River, men were obliged to take to the land,



and pursue the route through the woods. An Oneida Indian, who was considered every way trustworthy and reliable, and supposed to be familiar with the woods and the route, was selected as a guide. Four hours remained before the moon set, the time appointed to attack the fort, then four miles distant.

The guide took the lead, the men following his track. In two hours' time, not discovering an opening in the woods, Col. Willett went to the front to ascertain the cause, and learned the guide was considerably ahead and the men following blindly on the tracks in the snow; in the course of an hour the guide was overtaken and found standing still, apparently lost and bewildered. The men had been led into a swamp, some in sunken holes and many had frozen feet and one man was frozen to death. The guide had struck other tracks in the snow, which he followed supposing they led to the fort, but instead, they led in another direction down the lake. In this perplexity there was no alternative but to forego the attack on the fort, and to retrace their steps. The men were in the woods three days without provisions, and were gone twelve days on the expedition. Before they left Fort Herkimer peace had been concluded in Europe, but it was not known in this country; while this expedition was on its way to Oswego, the news of peace was received by Congress. After Col. Willett returned to his headquarters he went to Albany and there heard the glorious news proclaimed to the rejoicing inhabitants by the town clerk at the city hall. In Col. Willett's "narrative," the letters to him from Gen. Washington in relation to that expedition, are published, and the one of March 5, 1783, completely exonerates him from all blame and expresses the high sense which the commander-in-chief entertained of Col. Willett's persevering exertions and zeal on that expedition, and tendered his warmest thanks on the occasion.

On Friday, April 11, 1783, Congress issued its proclamation announcing a cessation of hostilities on sea and land, and once again smiling peace prevailed throughout the borders. The thirteen colonies were now a free and independent nation, the armies were disbanded, the soldiers returned to the peaceful pursuits of life, exchanged the weapons of war for the implements of husbandry, the scattered population of the country gradually gathered at their firesides, at their old homes, and once more the people of Tyron county rejoiced and smiled through their tears.

And now was to follow the inauguration of a new government, the

adoption of a new civil polity and the creation of new offices. Old things were to be done away and all things to become new. There was a general hatred of everything that was English, and a universal feeling that, as far as possible, it should be banished from the land. The name of Kings' College was changed to that of Columbia. The county of Charlotte, named in honor of England's queen, the wife of George III, of revolutionary times, was, by an act of the legislature of April, 1784, changed to that of Washington; while by the same act of the legislature, and as a grateful tribute and sense of poetic justice, the county named after the hated and last Tory governor of New York, the county wherein Col. Willett achieved his grandest triumphs, was given the name of the patriot, Montgomery, under whom Capt. Willett won his first laurels in battling for the existence of the infant republic. These are but a few instances of the changes effected. So, too, those who had served faithfully and honorably in the war, were generally remembered and rewarded in the civil appointments in the State, although no law was passed, as there was 100 years later, requiring such appointments to be preferential. Col. Samuel Clyde, a major at the battle of Oriskany, and who had rendered efficient services in the Mohawk valley as an officer in the American army, was appointed the first sheriff of Montgomery county, Col. Colbrath, another officer in the patriot army, and lieutenant in the "Sullivan expedition," was appointed the first sheriff of Herkimer, and later, the first one of Oneida. Col. Willett was elected to the assembly from New York in 1783, and the next year appointed sheriff of that county for three years. To be "high sheriff" was considered in those times of more importance, dignity and consequence than in these days to be governor of the State. The grandfather of Col. Willett was sheriff of Queens county in 1820, and his ancestors sheriffs of that county as follows: Thomas Willett in 1683, Elbert in 1705, Thomas in 1707, Cornelius in 1708 and Thomas in 1770. In 1790 Col. Willett was appointed by President Washington commissioner to the Creek Indians, on a peace mission, that tribe having assumed a hostile attitude. He left in March and was absent four months, and was eminently successful in his errand, and war was averted. Col. Willett's thorough acquaintance with Indian character, habits, modes of thought and reasoning, peculiarly fitted him for such a mission. In 1791 he was again appointed sheriff of New York, and held the office this time for four years. Col. Willett was of powerful frame and of great

physical strength, and, of course, perfectly fearless. It is stated that while sheriff, to quell a riotous assemblage, he collared the ringleader, a brawny, broad shouldered, two-fisted butcher, and laid his prostrate form on the floor, where he was held as powerless as a hopped sheep. In 1792 Col. Willett was elected one of the directors of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Canal, the object being internal improvements, to connect the waters of the Hudson with Lakes George and Champlain and those of the Mohawk with Wood Creek at Rome. In the same year a general Indian war with the western tribes was apprehended, and Col. Willett was tendered the office of brigadier general in the United States army. This position he declined as he was not in favor of thus dealing with the Indians; his advocacy of peace policy was adopted and war avoided. In 1807 he was appointed mayor of New York in place of DeWitt Clinton and was, a year later, succeeded by Mr. Clinton. That office in those times of Col. Willett was one of great honor, dignity and emolument, and was sought after by men of ability and high standing. It is said to have been worth from \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year, and Col. Willett said that office yielded him a greater revenue during the year he held it, than did the seven years' office of sheriff. In 1803 when DeWitt Clinton was first appointed to that office, he resigned the office of United States Senator to accept it, and he had for his competitors Edward Livingston, Morgan Lewis, then Justices of the Supreme Court of the State, and the next year elected Governor.

The great-grandfather of Col. Willett, it will be remembered, was the first English mayor of New York. In 1811 DeWitt Clinton was the nominee for the office of lieutenant-governor of one branch of his party, and Col. Willett of the other branch. Col. Nicholas Fish, of the army of the revolution, father of Hamilton Fish, afterward governor, was the Federal nominee. The latter received an overwhelming majority in New York city as the opponents of Mr. Clinton, in his own party, voted direct for Mr. Fish, as the surer way of defeating Mr. Clinton. But the latter was elected, as he was strong in the rural districts. Hammond's Political History of New York, in referring to this contest, says that Col. Willett had been an officer of great merit in the revolutionary war, and in private life was regarded as an amiable and worthy citizen, but he had been somewhat wavering in politics and, in former days, had been inclined to support the faction of Aaron Burr. In the war of 1812 an immensely large public war

meeting was held in City Hall Park in August, 1814, to support that war and approve the measures of President Madison. Col. Willett addressed that meeting and, while standing beneath the flag of the nation, which waved over his head, he made a brief, but telling speech, which awakened unbounded enthusiasm and applause. He said it was a favorite toast in the war of the revolution that "May every citizen become a soldier, and every soldier a citizen," and that the time had again come when our citizens must be soldiers. He concluded his brief speech as follows: "In the war of the revolution there was a chorus to a song we used to sing in camp, in days of much more danger, which ran as follows:

Let Europe empty all her force,  
We'll meet them in array  
And shout Huzza, Huzza, Huzza.  
For life and liberty.

This pithy discourse from an old man, near seventy-five years of age, whose services in behalf of his country were well known, was applauded to the very echo.

In the Greek revolution of 1823 Col. Willett warmly sympathized with the oppressed of that country. He was chairman of a committee appointed to aid the Greeks in their struggle for independence. A large meeting was held in the park in New York city, which was addressed by Col. Willett.

In that speech, he referred to the fact that it was in the same place, where he assisted in 1765 in burning effigies of those who aided in the passage of the odious stamp act; the same park, where enthusiastic meetings were held in 1775, in favor of American independence in which he took part; that those were glorious times for him, and that the struggle of the Greeks was not unlike that of the Americans for freedom. He offered to aid the cause of Greece by donating 2,000 acres of land to which he was entitled by an act of the legislature of New York, passed in March, 1781. He said his labors in defending the frontiers of New York, by which he earned that bounty, were by far the most arduous of any that he performed during the whole revolutionary war; that there was more fatigue, more hazard and more anxiety in one of those campaigns than in seven such as he had served under Washington. Such is Col. Willett's testimony as to his labors in Tryon county. In 1824, presidential electors in New York were appointed by the legislature; Col. Willett was one of the appointees, and was elected president of the electoral college.

Whether he voted for John Quincy Adams, Gen. Jackson, Henry Clay or William H. Crawford, all them candidates, I have not ascertained. In 1824, President Monroe, pursuant to a resolve of Congress invited LaFayette to become the guest of this nation; he accepted the invitation, but modestly declined the offer of a conveyance to this country in a United States ship of the line. He left Havre July 12, 1824, and after a voyage of 34 days, arrived off Sandy Hook quite early in the morning of Sunday, August 15. Forty thousand people crowded the Battery to cheer and welcome his coming. Among the very first to meet and take LaFayette by the hand, was Joseph Bonaparte, then residing at Bordentown, New Jersey, ex-king of Spain, and brother of the great Napoleon. At 9 o'clock in the morning, a small vessel steamed up to quarantine to take LaFayette direct to the city, but as it was Sunday and he was to have a public reception in New York on the morrow he declined to go, but, instead, went straightway to the residence of Vice President Daniel D. Tompkins on Staten Island. It was near forty years since LaFayette had left this country, and when his feet once again touched American soil, the memories of the past, the great changes since his first coming, came rushing to the front in the thoughts of the thronging multitude who witnessed his landing, and the emotions were too great for suppression—too great to find utterance, except by salutes from all the ships in the harbor, the roaring of cannon, the ringing of bells and the loud acclaim of the people that the illustrious guest of the nation might receive a joyous and universal welcome. Nothing like it had ever before been witnessed on this continent. In the afternoon a vessel steamed over to Staten Island, taking a deputation from the common council of New York and a number of officers and soldiers of the revolutionary army, who had served under or with LaFayette. Among the number was Col. Willett. Those two became acquainted in 1778, while with Washington in the Jerseys and at the battle of Monmouth on June 28 of that year. A correspondence had been kept up between them subsequent to the close of the war, and many of LaFayette's letters are now in possession of the youngest son of Col. Willett and are in an excellent state of preservation and show, in their perfect legibility and neatness, the care with which LaFayette's correspondence was always conducted. The English of the letters is faultless in construction and orthography. For the purpose of preservation, and as showing the strong friendship existing between those two

soldiers, I herewith copy the whole of one letter and extracts from others:

PARIS. July 13, 1822.

*My Dear Sir:*

I avail myself of a good opportunity to remind you of your old friend and fellow-soldier in whose heart no time or distance can abate the patriotic remembrance and personal affections of our Revolutionary career. We remain but two survivors of that glorious epoch in which the fate of the two hemispheres has been decided. It is an additional reason to cherish more and more the ties of brotherly friendship which unite us. I find myself again engaged in a critical struggle between right and privilege.

May it be in my power before I join our departed companions to visit such of them as are still inhabitants of the United States and to tell you personally my dear Willett, how affectionately I am

Your sincere friend

LaFAYETTE.

Under date of July 1, 1824, a short time before LaFayette sailed from Europe he wrote Col. Willett in which he says: "The time most happy to me approaches when I shall embrace my old friend and brother soldiers," and concludes, "most truly and affectionately yours, LaFayette."

Under date of April 12, 1826, after his return to France, he writes: "Happy I am in every opportunity to renew and to form American connections. In so pleasing company I enjoy those feelings of American home which were never obliterated in my mind. Be pleased dear Willett, to let me hear from you and of the state of your health. Present my affectionate regards first in your house, then to your neighbors and to all our military companions and other friends in New York. Ever truly and affectionately your old friend and brother in arms, LaFayette."

Under date of April 6, 1828, he writes: "My dear Willett: It is fit I should present to our senior revolutionary comrade a son of the illustrious and unfortunate Marshal Ney, who intends to visit the United States. I doubly rejoice in every opportunity to hear from you and to offer the best wishes and tender regards of your affectionate brother soldier, LaFayette."

Under date of Christmas, 1828, he writes again and concludes his letter as follows:

Be pleased to remember me most affectionately to all our dear comrades in New York and vicinity and to your family knowing me to be forever

Your affectionate friend and brother in arms,

LaFAYETTE.

Col. Willett.



The meeting between LaFayette and Col. Willett, at the house of Vice President Tompkins is described by an eye-witness as extremely affectionate and touching. They embraced and kissed each other over and over again, like devoted lovers, and LaFayette talking to Col. Willett very tenderly. The former was then sixty-seven years old, and Col. Willett eighty-four. During the time LaFayette was in New York he was a frequent visitor at Col. Willett's residence, and the two were as much together as LaFayette could find time to spare from the receptions and ovations almost constantly awaiting him. On Friday, August 20th, the nation's guest left New York for Boston, in a coach drawn by four white horses, accompanied by numerous delegations and escorted by the military. That same eye-witness, who describes that visit of LaFayette, says that the cavalcade which escorted him from the city, passed in its route fields of cabbages, and other agricultural products then growing upon the site now occupied by the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Those yet alive, whose memories go back sixty-five years, may remember LaFayette's tour through this valley in 1825.

The legislature of New York, by an act passed in October, 1779, attainted fifty-eight persons (three of whom were ladies) of treason, and confiscated their property. Among the number was John Tabor Kempe, the last Tory Attorney General of New York, and then the owner of one-sixteenth of Coxe's Patent, or tract of 47,000 acres, which stretches across what are now Rome, Westmoreland, Whitestown, Kirkland, New Hartford, Marshall, Paris and Bridgewater, in Oneida county. His wife before marriage was Grace Coxe, one of the patentees and also part owner of that patent. On a subdivision of that patent and a sale of Mr. Kempe's share under that confiscation act, George Washington, Governor George Clinton and Col. Willett became owners of land in the patent. Col. Willett became purchaser, in August, 1784, of over seven hundred acres, part of it not far from Hampton village in Westmoreland. Alex. Parkman, who moved into that town in 1790, obtained title to one hundred acres from Col. Willett. The latter was also the owner of two thousand acres, known as "Willett's patent," in the north part of the town of Steuben, in this county, next to the Ava town line; he, with Elias Van Benschoten, owned fifteen hundred acres in the town of Ava, next north of above two thousand acre tract, and called "Willett's small patent." Col. Willett also owned lands in Bayard's patent and in

Twenty Township tract, Chenango county, hence, it is evident Oneida county people should be farther attracted and drawn toward one who was largely interested in lands in this county and vicinity so soon after the revolution, and fourteen years before Oneida county was organized.

Not long after the close of the revolutionary war, and probably within the last decade of the last century, Col. Willett purchased, for a homestead, a large parcel of vacant ground in what is now the thirteenth ward of New York city, near Corlear's Hook, extending from East River to what is now Willett street on the west. It is bounded northerly by DeLancey and southerly by Broome street. It was then quite out of the city and far into the suburbs. A long range of hills loomed up between that purchase and Broadway, so that a sight of the then seeming busy city was shut out from the view, and a long space of vacant ground intervened and had to be traversed before schools, churches and the marts of trade were reached from that homestead. The land toward East River was shelving, so that the rushing waters made frequent inroads and gradual encroachments upon the lower portions, to obviate which the dirt from the range of hills in front was, in due time, moved to the rear of the lot next to the river, and in that way the waves were stayed and a fine water frontage created. To improve and make that home pleasant and attractive, Col. Willett expended much money and labor, and many years of his life. The grounds were tastefully laid out into a garden, walks, carriageways and arbors, with fruit and shade trees planted upon and around the enclosure. A long row of poplars fringed the garden on one side, while cedar and other evergreens embellished or shaded the walks and other parts of the grounds. These trees were planted some years before the present century, for the eldest son alive of Col. Willett, now eighty-seven, writes me they were full grown at his earliest recollection. Not far from the center of those grounds the owner built a large, commodious and roomy dwelling, and there, for over a quarter of a century, he entertained his numerous visitors and callers, with a welcome and a generous hospitality, that no one knows better, if so well, how to extend, than an army officer who has seen much of the world; there too, he furnished a home and a cordial welcome to dependent relatives, to whom he was all that the most kind and indulgent parent could be. Although not a *millionaire*, yet he was in comfortable circumstances, kept his horses and carriage, lived generously for

those times, all of which could be done in those days of frugality and simplicity, on an income of five or six thousand dollars a year. One day last summer that eldest son crossed over from Jersey City to revisit the scenes of his childhood, that he might give a better description for this paper prepared in memory of his father, of that old homestead and of the grounds where his feet rambled when a boy. But indeed how changed; seven or eight busy streets now cross those grounds, while the site of the garden, the walks, the carriage-ways, the trees, the arbors, is now occupied by solid brick structures like Hoe's Printing Press Works, large Catholic Church, and buildings of that description; yet in his mind's eye he again saw the home as it was early in the present century, the long range of hills, over which he climbed on his way to school, the play ground, the boys of his youth, the fruit trees which yielded profusely, the large favorite cherry tree, capable of holding a small army of boys upon its huge and wide spreading branches, stood out a conspicuous figure as he looked back over the vista of years; many an afternoon in summer at the close of school, a hundred boys could be found ensconced in that generous tree, partaking of its seeming inexhaustible supply, with a zest and a relish that no one can enjoy so well as a schoolboy. He of all others, in that great city, was probably the only survivor who could remember, in all its details, those grounds as they were years ago. During Col. Willett's residence there and for years thereafter that old homestead was widely known as "Cedar Grove" or "The Willett Place."

In 1783, Col. Willett was among the active persons who formed the Society of Cincinnati, having for its object the promotion of brotherly feeling among the officers who served in the war of the revolution. When LaFayette visited this country in 1824, he was the only surviving major general who belonged to that society, so too, Col. Willett was a member of the Tammany society, formed about the same time, more for the purpose, however, of keeping in check the apprehended tendency of the government to monarchy; not until many years later, did it become an organization to promote the success of a political party.

Col. Willett was three times married. The first marriage was to Mary Pease in April, 1760, before he was quite twenty years of age. By that marriage one son was born, who became a noted surgeon in the United States army, and who died unmarried. Unto the second marriage no children were born. The third wife

was Margaretta Bancker, married not far from 1800; by her he had four children. The eldest son, Marinus, was a physician, and married and had children; he is now deceased. William M. was the second son by that marriage; married and now eighty-seven years old, and living in Jersey City, a retired divine of the Methodist Episcopal Church; was a member of the Methodist Episcopal General Conference in 1826; later, an instructor in Hebrew and Biblical literature in Wesleyan University and editor. In 1843 he founded the Biblical Institute in Vermont, of which he was president until 1848. Edward, the other son, is a lawyer by profession, now eighty-six years old, and residing at Brook Green, S. C. The fourth child was Margaretta, who married James H. Ray and died years ago. The widow of Col. Willett died in 1867, at the age of ninety-six.

Col. Willett was tall, erect, commanding figure, finely proportioned, with the air and build of a military man. His face was handsome, his eyes blue, his countenance very pleasing and attractive, and his manners those of a courteous and cultivated gentleman. One of his full length portraits, taken when he was thirty-five years old, in continental uniform, by Trumbull, is now in possession of his youngest son, as are the sword and hanger worn by Col. Willett during the war. A portrait of Col. Willett is shown on page 272 of Lossing's History of the Empire State. Col. Willett was a plain, blunt man, outspoken, perfectly fearless, a hater of all shams and an enthusiastic patriot. His acquaintance and correspondence with the prominent men of his day were extensive. His son has dozens of letters to his father from Governor Clinton, Aaron Burr, LaFayette, Lord Stirling, and men of like character. He and Burr were in early times intimate friends, but after the duel with Hamilton, and Burr's trial for treason, they lived to meet and pass each other on the street without recognition. Col. Willett admired the political writings of Thomas Paine, but after the publication of "Paine's Age of Reason" his works were altogether discarded by Willett. He was a faithful attendant at the Protestant Episcopal Church, (St. Stephen's), then located on Christie street, one block from the Bowery, and about a mile from Col. Willett's residence.

In a foot note in Lossing's Empire State it is stated Col. Willett graduated from King's, now Columbia College. This may admit of some doubt, when it is remembered that Col. Willett entered the army before he was eighteen, and married before he was twenty. Nevertheless he was a person of unusually strong mind,

strengthened by observation and extensive reading. His correspondence and official army reports are clear and marked with accuracy and precision. As a public speaker he was a model. The fact that Col. Gansevoort deputed him to reply to St. Leger's demand for the surrender of Fort Stanwix, indicates that his ability in that line was recognized by the commanding officer. That speech deserves a place in every history and rhetorical school book in the land, alongside of Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death."

Among the last public acts of Col. Willett were, in 1824, while acting as chairman of the Greek committee, presidential elector, and welcoming LaFayette. During the last few years of his life he mingled but little in public affairs and with the outside world; surrounded by his family and immediate friends, he yielded slowly, but not reluctantly, to the gradual progress of decay. He had outlived his generation, and passed his fourscore years; his mind was constantly fixed upon the approaching change with trust and entire resignation; with the greatest humility, but at the same time with the liveliest feelings of piety. A few months before his death he was attacked with paralysis, from which he recovered; yet his body and constitution were much enfeebled by the stroke; medicine had to be frequently resorted to; the absence of his regular physician, in one of his attacks, induced him to neglect the usual remedies, and he was so severely attacked that his strength wasted rapidly away.

On Sunday, August 22, 1830, the fifty-third anniversary of the abandonment of the siege of Fort Stanwix, Col. Willett passed peacefully away—twenty-two days past his ninetieth birthday.

It is related, that as the shadows of death were curtaining the earthly vision of Stonewall Jackson, he, in the delirium of his dying, was again in the roar of battle, and amid the clangor of arms, and called out—"Order A. P. Hill to prepare for action. Pass the infantry to the front rapidly. Tell Major Hawkes"—then he stopped, leaving the sentence unfinished. Presently a smile of ineffable sweetness spread itself over his wan face, "as if his soul had seen a vision," and then he said calmly and quietly, "let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees;" then without pain or a struggle, his spirit passed peacefully away. Col. Willett had been amid scenes of carnage and bloodshed; he had lived in turbulent times, and been exposed to innumerable perils; he had braved dangers, faced death, escaped the hissing bullet, the poisoned arrow, the glittering tomahawk, and the murderous



scalping knife, and survived to the grand old age of 90, to receive the homage and plaudits of a grateful people, and to die at last surrounded by his family and friends. He too, crossed over the river, and rested under the shade of the trees. His death cast a deep gloom over the whole city, and called forth deep and heartfelt expressions of sorrow. The Common Council of New York, the Court of Errors, then in session in that city, the society of Cincinnati, and other public bodies passed suitable resolutions, and resolved to attend his funeral in a body. The military of the city directed that appropriate honors should be paid at the interment, and that minute guns should be fired, corresponding with his age.

The public journals of the day, not in New York alone, but throughout the country, paid handsome and well-deserved tributes to his memory. The remains were enclosed in a cedar coffin, which the deceased had prepared ten years before; at his own request the body was habited in his ordinary dress and with his hat on, as he was accustomed to be seen in the street. The coffined remains were placed in an arbor upon the grounds of the old homestead on the day of the funeral, that all who chose might take a farewell look. It was estimated that over ten thousand persons availed themselves of the opportunity. The funeral took place in the afternoon of Tuesday, August 24, at which officiated Rev. Dr. DeWitt, a son of an old officer of the revolution under Col. Willett. The procession started at 4 P. M. for the place of burial, and it extended from Broome street to Trinity Church yard, where the remains were to be interred. It was after dark before the grave was reached and by the light of torches all that was earthly of Col. Marinus Willett was lowered to his last resting place amid the firing of guns, the strains of martial music and the sorrows of millions of his admiring countrymen.

Other heroes of the revolution may stand out more prominently on the pages of recorded history; other names may be perpetuated in poetry and song, in flowing numbers and in brighter colors; other men may be kept alive in the world's remembrance by lettered inscriptions of their heroic deeds emblazoned upon chiseled marble or sculptured monuments, but none who lived in the trying and troublous times of Col. Willett more faithfully or efficiently than he, and certainly none within the county of Tryon, performed the important work assigned to him, which in the result worked out the grand problem of his country's destiny. He was a fearless leader, an enthusiastic patriot, a worthy citizen and an uncompromising friend of the rights of man.

















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